



MINI-PILLS (Progesterone-Only Oral Contraceptives)

What are Mini-Pills?

Mini-Pills are progesterone-only birth control pills taken in a cycle of once per day for 28 days. They have a synthetic form of the progesterone hormone and no estrogen. The Mini-Pill affects the mucus around the cervix, making it harder for sperm to enter the uterus. It also affects the transport of the egg through the fallopian tubes. In these ways, the Mini-Pill prevents fertilization. Mini-Pills are 87 to 99.7% effective, slightly less than regular birth control pills. They do not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS.

Use

There are hormones in each Mini-Pill; there are no spacer pills. It is important to take a pill every day, preferably at the same time each day. Forgetting a Mini-Pill or taking it late increases the chance of pregnancy more than missing a regular birth control pill.

You can improve the effectiveness of Mini-Pills by adding a backup method, like condoms or spermicide. This is most important during the first three months, and days eight through eighteen of your menstrual cycle after the first three months.

Starting Mini-Pills

Take the first pill on the first day of your period. Take one pill daily, at the same time of day, even during your period.

After the First Pack

As soon as you finish one pack, begin the next one. Start your next pack even if you are still bleeding or have not started your period. Continue taking one pill every day.

If you have problems with the Mini-Pill, call the clinic. **Do not** stop taking the Mini-Pills unless you want to get pregnant or can use another method of birth control.

Missed Pills

Three or more hours late: Take a pill as soon as you remember. Use a backup method for 48 hours.

One pill missed: Take a pill as soon as you remember and take the next one at the usual time. This may mean taking two pills in one day. If you only miss one pill and make it up, you probably will not get pregnant. Use a backup method for two weeks.

Two pills missed: Take two pills each day for the next two days. Use a backup method for two weeks. You may have some spotting or bleeding. If the bleeding is like a period, call the clinic.

Three or more pills missed: Use a backup method and call the clinic for instructions.

Never take more than two pills in one day.

Your Health

Every woman is different and Mini-Pills are not recommended for all women. Due to the risk of serious health problems, women with unexplained vaginal bleeding, known or suspected pregnancy, or breast cancer should not use Mini-Pills.

Mini-Pills may not be recommended for women who are concerned with weight gain, have liver disease, gallbladder disease, heart disease, diabetes, or a history of depression.

Risks

Mini-Pills increase the risk of having functional ovarian cysts. They also very slightly increase the risk of ectopic pregnancy. An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a fertilized egg attaches and grows outside the uterus. This can be very dangerous and requires emergency medical attention.

To protect your health, watch out for the Mini-Pill's "ACHES" danger signs and call a doctor immediately:

- A**bdominal pains (severe)
- C**hest pain or shortness of breath
- H**eadaches (severe)
- E**ye problems, such as blurred vision
- S**evere leg or arm pain or numbness

Benefits

Women on Mini-Pills have a decreased risk of endometrial cancer and pelvic inflammatory disease. They may have less menstrual cramping and pain, fewer periods, and less chance of anemia.

Side Effects

The most common side effect for women using Mini-Pills is irregular bleeding. While many women on Mini-Pills have normal periods, others may have irregular periods, spotting between periods or no periods at all. If you do not bleed for 60 days, call the clinic to arrange for a pregnancy test but continue taking your pills.

Other possible side effects of the Mini-Pill are mood changes, headaches, and lowered sex drive.

Some of the typical side effects of regular birth control pills, such as nausea, and breast tenderness, usually do not occur with Mini-Pills.

Drug Interactions

The effectiveness of Mini-Pills is lowered when taken with certain medications. These drugs include rifampin and anti-seizure medications. If you are taking any medications, tell your clinician. When taking medications that may interfere with Mini-Pills, consider adding a backup method of birth control, like condoms and spermicide. As with all drugs, it is useful to inform all your medical providers if you are using hormonal birth control.

Future Fertility

Women who want to become pregnant may stop using Mini-Pills at any time. Fertility may return immediately or after a few months.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Advantages

- ◆ Avoids typical side effects of regular birth control pills.
- ◆ Has no estrogen.
- ◆ Easy to use.
- ◆ Does not harm future fertility.
- ◆ Does not interrupt sex play.

Disadvantages

- ◆ Does not protect against STIs, including HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ Must be taken every day at the same time.
- ◆ Less effective when taken with some drugs.
- ◆ Increased risk of functional ovarian cysts and ectopic pregnancy.
- ◆ May cause irregular bleeding.
- ◆ Requires a prescription.

Emergency Contraception

You can prevent pregnancy after unprotected intercourse by having a copper IUD inserted within one week of unprotected intercourse or by taking emergency contraception pills (the morning after pill). The pills work best in the first 24 to 48 hours but may work for several days. You can get one brand - Plan B - from your local pharmacy without a prescription if you are 17 years or older. If you are under 17 or if you want to use your insurance, you can get the prescription right at the pharmacy by talking with the pharmacist. Go to your local pharmacy to find out more, or call Cedar River Clinics at 800-572-4223 to get Plan B in Renton or Tacoma.

To find Emergency Contraception, see this website: ec.princeton.edu. If you already have birth control pills in your possession, this website explains how to use them as emergency contraception.

In Washington State, you can get Plan B directly from your pharmacy. Call ahead to make sure they have it in stock. Some women are buying Plan B in advance so they will have it on hand if they need it.

Further Resources

- ◆ *Our Bodies, Ourselves* - www.ourbodiesourselves.org
- ◆ www.avert.org - dedicated to averting HIV and AIDS
- ◆ Feminist Women's Health Center - www.FWHC.org and www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info
- ◆ If you are uninsured and live in Washington State, you may qualify for FREE birth control under the State sponsored program called Take Charge. Teens do not need parent's permission. Call 800-770-4334 to find out if you qualify for Take Charge. Then you can apply for Take Charge at Cedar River Clinics.

Cedar River Clinics in Renton and Tacoma, WA make birth control and abortion accessible so that women may decide their futures.

www.CedarRiverClinics.org or 800-572-4223

www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info

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